

A POETRY RECITAL

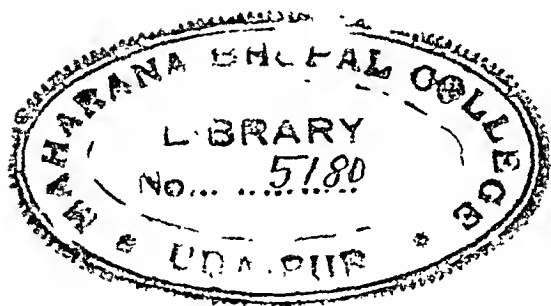
BY
JAMES STEPHENS

THE CROCK OF GOLD • DEIRDRE
THE INSURRECTION IN DUBLIN
REINCARNATIONS • THE DEMI-GODS
HERE ARE LADIES • THE HILL OF
VISION • IRISH FAIRY TALES
IN THE LAND OF YOUTH

A POETRY RECITAL

BY

JAMES STEPHENS



New York
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Press of
J. J. Little & Ives Company
New York

TO
MARY AND CORNELIUS SULLIVAN
WITH THE LOVE OF
JAMES AND CYNTHIA STEPHENS

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FOREWORD

There has been some misconception as to my purpose in publishing this book, and I would like to explain in this second edition that the title "A Poetry Recital" exactly indicates the purpose of this volume. The poems given are those which I selected for recitation during my lecture tour in the United States in 1925. In order to be audible in the large halls and theatres in which I spoke, poems of a certain quality of sound had to be used. This book is, therefore, not to be taken as a final selection from my work in verse, but as containing the poems which I consider to be best adapted for public utterance.

I have made many experiments in verse, and many of the poems in this book are experimental. In "The Paps of Dana," for example, there are six lines which should be repeated in one breath (from the words "peak to peak" to "into the clouds"). The poem is about a mountain, and — on repeating the lines indicated, a speaker should be as out of breath as if he had actually climbed the hill. "The Centaurs" tries to reproduce the beating of a horse's hooves. In "The Fur Coat" I tried to capture something of the delicate impertinence of a cat. In "The Coolun" I sought to represent that state, which is almost entirely a condition of dream, wherein the passion of love has almost

overreached itself, and is sinking to a motionless languor. "The Rose in the Wind" seeks to reproduce a swaying and balancing that would be slow enough and gentle enough and limited enough to justify that title. In "The Voice of God" I tried to give an immense quantity and quality of sound, and in "The Main Deep" I sought for a rhythm and a motion that would convey the roll, and march, and rush of great waters. A critic, commenting on this poem, wrote that it should not have been published "even as an experiment." It may be regarded as an experiment, but it is also a thing done. Generally, in dealing with the sea, in dealing with any external thing, the poet will desert his non-human subject (the sea, or the air, or what not), and hedge himself, after the first explanatory line, behind the thought and action of a human being. Thus in

"Roll on, thou deep and dark blue ocean, roll.
... Man marks the earth with ruin ..."

Byron gave one line to the sea, and the remainder of his poem to intellections, or even platitudes, on the futility of ambition. In singing about birds almost all poets, even the very greatest, evade their manifest duty to their matter—they will not sing or fly—they philosophise. They do an injustice, on the one hand, to philosophy, and, on the other hand, to their bird, and their readers, and themselves. A bird sings over and over one phrase, but the poetic bird sings a dictionary.

Another poem in this collection which has been ill-interpreted is "Away! Far Away!". In this poem I

tried to mould the rhythm which I think of as Death. It is properly, if not a Funeral March, a Keen, and to get its quality at all it should be uttered in the manner indicated by the foot-note. This foot-note has earned for me a series of critical exclamations that includes all the shades between kindly commiseration for another good man gone wrong and the desire to kill one who was ill-treating the English language. It is commonly believed that in verse only vowel sounds can be held or prolonged — this is not so. Most of the so-called consonants can be held for as long as one pleases, and, in especial the letter-sounds *l*, *m*, *n* can be held for as long a period and uttered as loudly as any vowel of them all. There is vastly more sound in the English language than the English poet permits himself to use.

In "The Pit of Bliss" I tried to give in the third verse the effect of an eagle tumbling violently through all of the space that he had previously climbed, and by a curious sympathetic action the fourth verse repeats in the mind the tumble that had previously been in the air.

I have added a few poems for this second edition. "Little Things" is a variation on the Lord's Prayer. "The Crest Jewel" and "Thy Soul" are both founded on the Vedas. In the first I have taken it that there are only two systems of Philosophy — the Philosophy of Pessimism and the Philosophy of the Soul. I have tried in the first verse to give the normal pessimistic statement, and in the second verse to raise that to an absolute utterance. The third verse seeks to convey the accepted doctrine of the Soul, and the fourth verse to raise that doctrine to its absolute utterance.

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It is a proper rule that a writer should not reply to criticism. The examination of any artist's work during his life-time is bound to be tentative and experimental, and he cannot do anything to assist it. These remarks merely embody suggestions that I made to my audiences as to the reasons or emotions that shaped these poems.

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A POETRY RECITAL

LITTLE THINGS

LITTLE things, that run, and quail,
And die, in silence and despair!

Little things, that fight, and fail,
And fall, on sea, and earth, and air!

All trapped and frightened little things,
— The mouse, the coney — hear our prayer!

As we forgive those done to us,
— The lamb, the linnet, and the hare —

Forgive us all our trespasses,
Little creatures, everywhere!

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Forgive us all our trespasses,
Little creatures, everywhere!

THE SNARE

I HEAR a sudden cry of pain!
I There is a rabbit in a snare:
Now I hear the cry again,
But I cannot tell from where.

But I cannot tell from where
He is calling out for aid!
Crying on the frightened air,
Making everything afraid!

Making everything afraid!
Wrinkling up his little face!
As he cries again for aid;
And I cannot find the place!

And I cannot find the place
Where his paw is in the snare!
Little One! Oh, Little One!
I am searching everywhere!

THE MERRY MUSIC

LETTING the merry music stray
In dance of leaf, and flirt of wing!
All along a sunny way
Intermits sweet bubbling!
Lovely time is come, and gone,
Or ever it was looked upon!

Golden chime, and silver chime!
Silver laughter, golden joy!
Happy song, not come to rhyme!
Lovely thought, that words annoy!
Comes the dream of living — and
Vanished is fairy land!

Who has drunk an air that shone!
Or breathed on a note of gold!
Has seen them disappearing on
The lip that took, the lip that told!
While — life danced on in careless way,
Letting the merry music stray!

THE FIFTEEN ACRES

(1)

I CLING and swing
On a branch, or sing
Through the cool, clear hush of morning O!

Or fling my wing
On the air, and bring
To sleepier birds a warning O!

That the night's in flight!
And the sun's in sight!
And the dew is the grass adorning O!

And the green leaves swing
As I sing, sing, sing!
Up by the river,
Down the dell,
To the little wee nest,
Where the big tree fell,
So early in the morning O!

(II)

I flit and twit
In the sun for a bit,
When his light so bright is shining O!

Or sit, and fit
My plumes, or knit
Straw plaits for the nest's nice lining O!

And she, with glee,
Shows unto me,
Underneath her wing reclining O!

And I sing that Peg,
Has an egg, egg, egg!
Up by the oat-field,
Round the mill;
Past the meadow,
Down the hill;
So early in the morning O!

(III)

I stoop and swoop
On the air, or loop
Through the trees, and then go soaring O!

To group, with a troop,
On the skiey poop,
While the wind behind is roaring O!

I skim and swim
By a cloud's red rim;
And up to the azure flooring O!

And my wide wings drip,
As I slip, slip, slip,
Down through the rain-drops,
Back where Peg
Broods in the nest
On the little white egg,
So early in the morning O!

THE CREST JEWEL

(I)

THE leaf will wrinkle to decay,
And crumble into dust away!

The rose, the lily, grow to eld,
And are, and are no more, beheld!

Nothing will stay! For, as the eye
Rests upon an object nigh,

It is not there to look upon!
It is mysteriously gone!

And, in its place, another thing
Apes its shape and fashioning!

(II)

All that the sun will breathe to-day
The moon will lip and wear away

To-night! And all will rebegin
To-morrow as the dawn comes in!

Is no beginning, middle-trend,
Or argument to that, or end!

No cause and no effect, and no
Reason why it should be so!

Or why it might be otherwise
To other minds, or other eyes!

(III)

The soul can dream itself to be
Adrift upon an endless sea

Of day and night! The soul can seem
To be all things that it can dream!

Yet needs but look within to find
That which is steady in the wind!

That which the fire does not appall
Which good and ill move not at all!

Which does not seek, or lack, or try!
And was not born, and cannot die!

(IV)

It has been writ in wisdom old —
This is the last word to be told:

— There is no dissolution! No
Creation! There are none in woe!

There is no teacher, teaching, taught!
Are none who long for, lack for aught!

Are none who pine for freedom! None
Are liberated under sun!

—And this is absolutely true
In Him who dreams in me and you.

THY SOUL

YOUNG Nachiketas went to Death!
He bargained with the Monarch grim
For Knowledge, as the Katha saith,
And Death revealed the Soul to him!
And who learns with the fearless lad
Hath All that Nachiketas had.

Death Said:

From That the sun and moon arise;
They set in That again:
From That are seas, and stars, and skies,
And trees, and beasts, and men:
And That of Soul, is This of Sense;
Between Them is no difference.

All that is Here, the same is There;
All that is There, is Here:
There is no difference Anywhere;
The One doth All appear!
From death to death he goes, who sees
Differences, or Degrees.

That which is told of, That Thou Art,
There is no other Sprite;
No heaven, nor earth, nor middle part,
There is no day, or night;
There is no beauty, truth, or wit,
But That alone! And Thou Art It.

He dreameth — I am moon, and sun;
I am the earth, and sea;
I am the strife, the lost, the won;
I am Variety!
He dreameth This, and That, and Thou,
In past, and future time, and now!

He is the Dreamer, and the Dream!
He is the Frightened, and the Fear!
He is the Hope! the Gloom! the Gleam!
He is the Season, and the Year!
— He is not This, nor That, nor Yon:
He is Thyself! And Thou Art, One!

He will not be obtained by speech;
Not by the mind, the ear, the eye!
He cometh, in His time, to each
Who Him affirm, courageously!
Thou Art! He Is! And that is all
That may be told, or can befall!

Fast not, nor pray! But only know,
He Is — I am — And all is done!
The Deed of Time is finished! Lo,
Thy Self to Thine own Self art won!
Thou shalt not seek, nor have, reply,
For Thou Art That, in blink of eye.

Thou knew it all! 'Twas hid within
Thy Memory! Call but to mind
This, that Thou Art, and Death nor Sin
Shall conquer Thee again! Nor bind
Thine action! Nor make Thee to seem
A Dreamer, living in a Dream!

Awake!
Arise!
Put glory on,
Of which all Soul and Sense is wrought!
Thou shalt be naught Thou dreamed upon
Of good or evil Thing! Nor aught
That thought doth bicker at!
Thou shalt be Naught!
And Thou shalt be
Thy Self, and Thine own Mystery!
Knowledge! Bliss! Eternity!
For Thou Art That!

CHRISTMAS IN FREELANDS

THE Red-Bud, the Kentucky Tree,
Bloomed the spring to life for me
In Freelands; and the Mocking Bird
— Nimble chorister of glee,
Sweet as poet ever heard
In a world of ecstasy —
Sang the summer, and the sun;
Sang the summer in to me.

The spring is gone! The summer gone!
The Cardinal has gone away!
The Fire-flies, dancing on the lawn,
— Each a little moon at play —
Are gone, with summer, gone away!
And, where green acres were aglow,
Daisy munches in the snow!

A snowy field! A stable piled
With straw! A donkey's sleepy pow!
A Mother beaming on a Child!
A manger, and a munching cow!
— These we all remember now —

And airy voices, heard afar!
And three Magicians, and a Star!

Two thousand times of snow declare
That on the Christmas of the year
There is a singing in the air;
And all who listen for it hear
A fairy chime, a seraph strain
Telling He is born again,
— That all we love is born again.

THE PAPS OF DANA

THE mountains stand and stare around,
They are far too proud to speak,
Altho' they are rooted in the ground
Up they go, peak after peak,
Beyond the tallest house, and still
Soaring over tree and hill
Until you'd think they'd never stop
Going up, top over top,
Into the clouds — Still I mark
That a sparrow or a lark
Flying just as high can sing
As if he'd not done anything.

I think the mountains ought to be
Taught a little modesty.

THE FUR COAT

I WALKED out in my Coat of Pride,
I looked about on every side,
And said the mountains should not be
Just where they were, and that the sea
Was out of place, and that the beech
Should be an oak — And then from each
I turned in dignity as if
They were not there: I sniffed a sniff,
And climbed upon my sunny shelf,
And sneezed a while, and scratched myself.

THE CENTAURS

PLAYING upon the hill three centaurs were!
They lifted each a hoof and stared at me,
And stamped the dust.

They stamped the dust, they snuffed upon the air,
And all their movements had the fierce glee
Of power and pride and lust.

Of power and pride and lust! Then, with a shout,
They tossed their heads, they wheeled, and galloped
round
In furious brotherhood.

In furious brotherhood, around, about,
They charged, they swerved, they leaped, then, bound
on bound,
They raced into the wood.

THE DAISIES

I N the scented bud of the morning-O,
When the windy grass went rippling far,
I saw my dear one walking slow,
In the field where the daisies are.

We did not laugh and we did not speak
As we wandered happily to and fro;
I kissed my dear on either cheek,
In the bud of the morning-O.

A lark sang up from the breezy land,
A lark sang down from a cloud afar,
And she and I went hand in hand
In the field where the daisies are.

MARY HYNES

SHE is the sky of the sun,
She is the dart
Of love,
She is the love of my heart,
She is a rune,
She is above
The women of the race of Eve
As the sun is above the moon.

Lovely and airy the view from the hill
That looks down Ballylea;
But no good sight is good until
By great good luck you see
The Blossom of the Branches, walking
towards you
Airily.

THE COOLUN

COME with me, under my coat,
And we will drink our fill
Of the milk of the white goat,
Or wine if it be thy will;

And we will talk until
Talk is a trouble, too,
Out on the side of the hill;
And nothing is left to do,

But an eye to look into an eye,
And a hand in a hand to slip,
And a sigh to answer a sigh,
And a lip to find out a lip:

What if the night be black
Or the air on the mountain chill,
Where the goat lies down in her track
And all but the fern is still!

Stay with me, under my coat,
And we will drink our fill
Of the milk of the white goat,
Out on the side of the hill.

NANCY WALSH

I WITHOUT bite or sup,
If thou wert fated for me,

I would up

And would go after thee
Through mountains.

A thousand thanks from me

To God have gone,

Because I did not lose my senses to thee,

Though it was hardly I escaped from thee,

O Ringleted One!

PEGGY MITCHELL

A S lily grows up easily,
In modest, gentle, dignity,
To sweet perfection,
So grew she,
As easily.

Or as the rose, that takes no care,
Will open out on sunny air
Bloom after bloom, fair after fair,
Just so did she,
As carelessly.

She is our torment without end,
She is our enemy, our friend,
Our joy, our woe;
And she will send
Madness or glee
To you or me,
And endlessly.

GREEN WEEDS

TO be not jealous give not love;
Rate not thy fair all fair above,
Or thou'lt be decked in green, the hue
That jealousy is bounden to.

That lily hand, those lips of fire,
Those limpid eyes that spill desire,
Those mounds of lambent snow may be
Found anywhere it pleaseth thee

To turn. Then turn, and be not mad
Tho' all of loveliness she had:
She hath not all of loveliness;
A store remains wherewith to bless

The bee, the bird, the butterfly,
And thou — Go, search with those that fly
For that which thou shalt easy find
On every path and any wind.

Nor dream that she be Seal and Star
Who is but as her sisters are;

And whose reply is yes and no
To all that come and all that go.

“I love” — Then love again, my friend,
Enjoy thy love without an end;
“I love” — Ah, cease, know what is what,
Thou dost not love if she love not.

For if thou truly lovéd her
From thee away she could not stir,
But ever at thy side would be
Thyself and thy felicity.

Go, drape thee in the greeny hue!
Thou are not Love, she is not True,
And, no more need be said — adieu!

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NORA CRIONA

I HAVE looked him round and looked
him through,
Know everything that he will do
In such a case, and such a case,
And when a frown comes on his face
I dream of it, and when a smile
I trace its sources in a while.

He cannot do a thing but I
Peep and find the reason why:
Because I love him, and I seek,
Every evening in the week,
To peep behind his frowning eye
With little query, little pry,
And make him if a woman can
Happier than any man.

Yesterday he gripped her tight
And cut her throat — and serve her right!

RIGHTEOUS ANGER

THE lanky hank of a she in the inn over there
Nearly killed me for asking the loan of a glass of
beer:

May the devil grip the whey-faced slut by the hair,
And beat bad manners out of her skin for a year.

That parboiled ape, with the toughest jaw you will see
On virtue's path, and a voice that would rasp the dead,
Came roaring and raging the minute she looked at me,
And threw me out of the house on the back of my head!

If I asked her master he'd give me a cask a day;
But she, with the beer at hand, not a gill would arrange!
May she marry a ghost, and bear him a kitten, and may
The High King of Glory permit her to get the mange.

THE ROSE IN THE WIND

DIP and swing,
Lift and sway;
Dream a life,
In a dream, away.

Like a dream
In a sleep
Is the rose
On the wind;

And a fish
In the deep;
And a man
In the mind:

Dreaming to lack
All that is his;
Dreaming to gain
All that he is.

Dreaming a life,
In a dream, away;
Dip and swing,
Lift and sway.

OUT AND AWAY

SILVERY-BLACK, and silvery-blue,
Delicate, dainty, silvery shoe,
We are as young and as old as you.

Without, apart, afar, you climb,
Haunting the gulfs and the deeps of time;
What do you hunt, without reason or rhyme?

Me, and he, and she, and thee,
Lending each other our mystery;
Always the One, wherever we be.

Silvery-black, and silvery-blue,
Delicate, dainty, silvery shoe,
We are as old and as young as you.

THE VOICE OF GOD

I BENT again unto the ground,
And I heard the quiet sound
Which the grasses make when they
Come up laughing from the clay.

"We are the voice of God," they said:
Thereupon I bent my head
Down again that I might see
If they truly spoke to me.

But, around me everywhere,
Grass and tree and mountain were
Thundering in mighty glee,
"We are the voice of deity."

And I leapt from where I lay,
I danced upon the laughing clay,
And, to the rock that sang beside,
"We are the voice of God," I cried.

THE MAIN DEEP

THE long-rólling,
Steady-póuring,
Deep-trenchéd,
Green billów.

The wíde-topped,
Unbróken,
Green-glacid,
Slów-slíding,

Cóld-flushing,
— On-on-on —
Chill rushing,
Hush-hushing,
— Hush-hushing —

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Chill rushing,
Hush-hushing,
— Hush-hushing —

THE GOLDEN BIRD

IF Joy, The Golden Bird, would fly,
Do not close an hand upon her;
She belongeth to the sky,
With all the winds of heaven on her:
Only when her wings are free
Bird of Lovely Life is she.

He who Joy of Life would store
Heart of his be widely open;
Throw the key out, with the door,
Throw the hope out, with the holpen;
Give her, as she finds in sky,
Place to dip, and soar, and fly.

She will come again, I wist;
She of thee shall not be frightened;
She shall sing upon thy fist;
By her shall thy dark be lighted:
By her freedom thou art given
Right and room in Joyous Heaven.

CHILL OF THE EVE

A LONG, green swell
Slopes soft to the sea;
And a far-off bell
Swings sweet to me;
As the grey,
Chill day
Slips away
From the lea.

Spread cold and far,
Without one glow
From a mild, pale star,
Is the sky's steel bow,
And the grey,
Chill day
Slips away
Below.

Yon green tree grieves
To the air around,
And the whispering leaves
Have a lonely sound,

As the grey,
Chill day
Slips away
From the ground.

The long grass bends
With a rippling rush
To the soft, white ends
Where the roots are lush,
And the grey,
Chill day
Slips away
In a hush.

Down by the shore
The slow waves twine
From the rock-strewn floor
To the shell-edged line,
And the grey,
Chill day
Slips away
With a whine.

And dark, more dark,
The shades settle down,
Far off is a spark
From the lamp-lit town,

And the grey,
Chill day
Slips away
With a frown.

As the grey,
Chill day
Slips away
From the ground.

The long grass bends
With a rippling rush
To the soft, white ends
Where the roots are lush,
And the grey,
Chill day
Slips away
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Down by the shore
The slow waves twine
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And dark, more dark,
The shades settle down,
Far off is a spark
From the lamp-lit town,

And the grey,
Chill day
Slips away
With a frown.

ON A LONELY SPRAY

UNDER a lonely sky a lonely tree
Is beautiful. All that is loneliness
Is beautiful. A feather lost at sea;
A staring owl; a moth; a yellow tress
Of seaweed on a rock, is beautiful.

The night-lit moon, wide-wandering in sky;
A blue-bright spark, where ne'er a cloud is up;
A wing, where no wing is, it is so high;
A bee in winter, or a buttercup,
Late-blown, are lonely, and are beautiful.

She, whom you saw but once, and saw no more;
That he, who startled you, and went away;
The eye that watched you from a cottage door;
The first leaf, and the last; the break of day;
The mouse, the cuckoo, and the cloud, are beautiful.

For all that is, is lonely; all that may
Will be as lonely as is that you see;
The lonely heart sings on a lonely spray,
The lonely soul swings lonely in the sea,
And all that loneliness is beautiful.

All, all alone, and all without a part
Is beautiful, for beauty is all where;
Where is an eye is beauty, where an heart
Is beauty, brooding out, on empty air,
All that is lonely and is beautiful.

AWAY! FAR AWAY!

S LÓW
Creatures
Slów,

Nuzzle and press,
And take their food
In the darkness.

No stir is now
In all that once
Was all;

No dréam, no sight,
No soúnd, no sense
Is thére.

Unséeñ
The béam
Of the sun:

Unknówn
The ring
Of the light:

Unknówn
In the cave;
Unséén

By the slów,
Slów
Hungers.

Naught's
Left
But foód;

All else
That was
Is awáy:

Far awáy,

In the gléam,
In the ring
In the béam

In the Sun.

NOTE: Accented letters are to be sounded for as long as is possible. Two beats of this duration are to be held at the end of each line, four at the end of each verse. Unmarked words and phrases are to be said quickly, and ended sharply. All line endings and verse endings, or silences, are to be well held.

THE RIVALS

I HEARD a bird at dawn
Singing sweetly on a tree,
That the dew was on the lawn,
And the wind was on the lea;
But I didn't listen to him,
For he didn't sing to me.

I didn't listen to him,
For he didn't sing to me
About the dew upon the lawn,
And the wind upon the lea;
I was singing all the time
Just as prettily as he.

I was singing all the time,
Just as prettily as he,
About the dew upon the lawn
And the wind upon the lea;
So I didn't listen to him
As he sang upon a tree.

THE PIT OF BLISS

WHEN I was young I dared to sing
Of everything and anything;
Of joy and woe and fate and God,
Of dreaming cloud and teeming sod,
Of hill that thrust an amber spear
Into the sunset, and the sheer
Precipice that shakes the soul
To its black gape — I sang the whole
Of God and man, nor sought to know
Man or God, or joy or woe:
And, though an older wight I be,
My Soul hath still such ecstasy
That, on a pulse, I sing and sing
Of everything and anything.

There is a light shines in the head;
It is not gold, it is not red;
But, as the lightning's blinding light,
It is a stare of silver white
That one surmise might fancy blue:
On that mind-blinding hue I gaze
An instant, and am in a maze
Of thinking — could one call it so?
It is no feeling that I know

— An hurricane of knowing, that
Could whelm the soul that was not pat
To flinch and lose the deadly thing,
And sing, and sing again, and sing
Of everything and anything.

An eagle, whirling up the sky,
Sunblind, dizzy, urging high,
And higher beating yet a wing,
Until he can no longer cling,
Or hold, or do a thing, but fall
And sink, and whirl, and scream through all
His dizzy, heaven-hell of pit,
In mile-a-minute flight from it
That he had dared — From height of height,
So the poet takes his flight
And tumble in the pit of bliss,
And, in the roar of that abyss,
And falling, he will sing and sing
Of everything and anything.

What is knowing, 'tis to see:
What is feeling, 'tis to be:
What is love, but more and more
To see and be, to be a pour
And avalanche of being, till
The being ceases and is still
For very motion. What is joy
— Being, past all earthly cloy

And intermixture: being spun
Of itself is being won:
— That is joy. And this is God
To be that in cloud and clod,
And in cloud and clod to sing
Of everything and anything.